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WHAT ABOUT CARPET. A SPEECH DELIVERED TO MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES, (CHICOPEE, MASSACHUSETTS, MAY 21, 1964).

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A SPEECH BASED ON THE OBSERVATIONS OF MILLARD J. SMITH, PRINCIPAL OF SHAKER HIGH SCHOOL, LATHAM, NEW YORK, REGARDING THE USE OF CARPETING CONCLUDES THE BEHAVIOR PATTERNS OF THE STUDENTS ARE ALTERED BY THE USE OF CARPETING. CARPETS PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO USE OTHER AREAS OF THE SCHOOL AS CLASSROOMS. HALLS, CORRIDORS, STAIRS, LOBBIES, AND FLOOR ARE ALL CLASSROOMS. IN ADDITION, CARPET PREVENTS NOISE. CARPETING PRODUCES THE ACOUSTICAL ATMOSPHERE WHICH ALLOWS PARTITIONS TO BE MOVED AND ALTERED AT WILL. ACOUSTICAL CONTROL THROUGH CARPETING ALLOWS TEACHERS TO TEACH BETTER, KEEPS NOISE LEVELS DOWN, AND PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY OF UTILIZATION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A MODERN SCHOOL PROGRAM. IT HAS BEEN FOUND THAT TEACHERS PREFER TO TEACH IN A CARPETED ENVIRONMENT. A PROBLEM IS WHEN CLEANING A SPOT THE CARPET IS CLEANER IN THAT AREA, HOWEVER, IN A FEW DAYS OF USE THE CARPET IS EVENED UP AGAIN. SPOT CLEANING IS DONE BY THE REGULAR CUSTODIAL STAFF. CARPET DOES COST LESS TO MAINTAIN AND THE SAVINGS CAN ADD UP TO THE COST OF REPLACING THE CARPET. VERY LITTLE TIME IS SPENT IN CLEANING CARPETS. ALSO THE EASE OF MAINTENANCE MEANS THAT CARPETED ROOMS CAN BE USED FOR AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES MORE THAN OTHER ROOMS BECAUSE THEY ARE ALWAYS READY. AN INVITATION IS EXTENDED BY MR. MILLARD TO VISIT SHAKER HIGH SCHOOL AND VIEW THEIR CARPET EXPERIMENT. IT IS REQUESTED THAT A LETTER BE SENT SPECIFYING THE PLANNED ARRIVAL DATE. (RK)

SPEECH BY MILLARD J. SMITH
PRINCIPAL OF SHAKER HIGH SCHOOL, LATHAM, NEW YORK
TO
MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES
CHICOPEE, MASSACHUSETTS
May 21, 1964

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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WHAT ABOUT CARPET

May I give you now my views on carpet in schools? They are based upon my first hand observations. Everything I say is available for you to see. All that is necessary is for you to write to me and let me know when you would like to visit. We like visitors, they help to establish a "tone" in our school. You should never hesitate to visit. All schools feel this way.

BEHAVIOR PATTERNS AT SHAKER

Behavior patterns are altered by carpet. Students are more polite and courteous. Hats come off on carpet. Voices are lowered on carpet. People walk on carpet. Boys are gentlemen on carpet. Girls are ladies on carpet. We don't have "Boys and Girls" rooms in our school. They are Ladies and Gentlemen rooms. This is not a strange idea that people act differently on carpet than they do on "hard" floors. We see it every day in business and at home. It is important for us to note, however, that this change in behavior pattern can be used in schools as a key to new techniques in education. Those whose patterns have changed are ready to try new approaches to education. They are motivated toward learning. It means that we can free professional people from routine chores to spend their time in teaching and preparing to teach. Our behavior patterns are such that we don't need to use teachers as monitors. We don't have teachers on "duty". There is no such thing in our school as hall duty or bus duty or detention duty or lunch room duty. Not one teacher in our school is assigned to one minute of duty outside of his classroom during the school day. It is my feeling that we can look at carpet as the major influence behind this excellent student behavior situation. In this period of educational history, when good teachers are difficult to find, when competition for those who are available is heavy, it is important that we do not waste the time of any of our staff on non-educational tasks.

WHERE EDUCATION OCCURS

But deeper than these "surface" behavior patterns, we have the attitudes of the students. They do seem more at ease and "ready" to learn. Learning is not just a classroom exercise. Carpets provide the opportunity to use other areas of the school as classrooms. Vast areas of the school which used to serve no other purpose except to give access to the classrooms are now used as teaching space. Halls, corridors, stairs, lobbies and floors all are classrooms. Young men and women are not reluctant to sit on the carpeted floors. No one feels "dirty" after sitting on carpet. Try asking high school youngsters to sit on a tile floor! How "ready" for learning would a young lady in a nice dress be after her teacher asked her to sit on a terrazzo stair tread while he demonstrated a physics experiment which could only be done in an area which was 15 feet high. This same situation occurs over and over in our school now. No one minds sitting in our stairwell amphitheater. I can envision the day when multiple use of stairs, halls, corridors, lobbies and entrances will be as popular in schools as are cafeteriums and gymatoriums today. The answer lies in the floor covering used.

ACOUSTICS

Now let's talk about acoustics. The best part about carpet is that they prevent noise. Kids don't make noise to be mean - not much of the time anyway. But kids are noisy. They tap and wiggle and drop and bump.. They contribute to the noise level of any classroom. On top of that the room contributes the background noise of the unit ventilators and window noises. The school provides locker noises, corridor noises and the sounds of adjacent classrooms. All of these noises force the teachers to talk a bit louder in order to talk over them. Thus the chain begins and at the end of the day we find that the teacher is not the same teacher he was at the beginning of the day. It is not hard to see that the student in the morning gets a better teacher than the student in the afternoon.

From personal visits and from my own teachers I know that carpet helps to reduce the difference between the teacher in the morning and the teacher in the afternoon.

FLEXIBILITY AND NOISE

The modern school must get away from the concept which places 30 students in a room with a teacher for 40 to 60 minutes at a time. If we are to get all we can across to a youngster during his high school years, we must open up the school and do things according to a more logical pattern. Lecturing to 120 students is no more difficult than lecturing to 30. Group discussion work with 10 is ideal. Group discussion with 30 is unrewarding to the majority who do not participate. Some pupils need individual attention. Carpeting is the answer to this kind of an educational program. It produces the acoustical atmosphere which allows partitions which may be moved and altered at will.

We have one large class instruction area at Shaker which has no wall between the corridor and the room.. It is a large room with 120 tablet arm chairs, an overhead projector and a sound amplifier system. There are five speakers in this room and everyone can hear the teacher well. The classes which are across the 12 foot corridor do not even close their doors when this large room is in use. Students use the corridor and go to lockers without disturbing the class in the large room. And all of this without any wall between the corridor and the room. The room is 56 feet long and no inside wall! We have had six groups working in this room without interfering with each other; without any partitions or separators whatsoever. This is the kind of acoustical control which carpet provides.

So acoustical control through carpeting allows teacher to teach better, keeps noise levels down and provides flexibility of utilization to meet the needs of a modern school program.

FACULTY RESPONSE

It is interesting to note the response of faculty members to carpet. They love it. It's easy on their feet and voices. My teachers are anxious to know when room assignments are made whether or not they will be in carpeted rooms. They are disappointed if they are not. Perhaps the most mentioned comment of teachers should be noted. It is the unanimous feeling of our teachers that they do a better job on carpet. It is not the carpet alone, but the atmosphere it creates. Maybe you do the same job of teaching as in other non-carpeted areas. It is just easier on carpet. Maybe it only feels easier, but it is easier to do a better job. My teachers have told me so.

CARPET MAINTENANCE

Because the maintenance of carpet seems to be the greatest doubt creator of this whole idea of carpet in schools, I have saved this point till last. Most people look at carpet as a fragile material which must be babied to make it last. This is a natural attitude because of our experiences in our homes. Commercially, however, carpet has been used in heavy traffic areas for many years and all of our exclusive restaurants have been carpeted without fear of food and beverage stains. Like so many materials, carpet is chosen for the specific job it is to do and we would not think of putting a domestic carpet in an area which needs a commercial grade

We have had all kinds of stains on our carpets. I don't believe that we could mention any material which has not been accidentally dropped on the carpets. Coffee, ink, milk, blood, acid, sodium hydroxide, grape juice, India ink, vomit, urine, grease, oil-light and heavy, water and tea. All of these seem to be problems in certain locations. The only problem we have had is that when we clean the spot we make the carpet cleaner in that area and it takes a few days of use to even up the carpet again. Not one stain has been a real problem to us, and we do not have outside specialists to spot clean our carpets.

CLEANING

All cleaning is done by our regular custodial staff. In the carpeted areas, each custodian has a cleaning kit of the type your wife has in your home. There is a cardboard wheel with all common stains listed on it. When you turn the wheel to the stain, the wheel indicates the solutions and the technique to use to clean it. It is as simple as that. Since most spillage occurs during the school day, most of our spot cleaning is done by our day custodians. They take great pride in their work and became experts soon after the school opened.

One of our first problems was India ink. You could not find the spot today even if you knew the general location where it was spilled. We have made no attempts to limit the use of our carpets or to prevent certain materials from being used on our carpets. As an experiment, we want to get as much information as possible. You have all heard that carpet costs less to maintain. This is true. It is also true that the savings can add up to the cost of replacing the carpet in a few years. Naturally, you would like to know how long carpet will last. So would we. The Carpet Institute, which sponsored the experiment, would like to know too.

May I say this to you. All of our carpet in our classrooms and corridors has been down for six years. We have not had to replace any of this carpet in this time. I do not feel that it will be necessary to replace the classroom carpet for at least 15 years. I feel that most of our corridor carpet will last at least 10 years. These are my figures and are based upon my judgement. Last year we extended the carpet to the stairways of our building. The purpose was to see the effect of stair carpet on the experiment and to see how long such areas would be able to hold carpet. For esthetic reasons we replaced the carpet at the top of each stairway. It was not necessary to do this, it only looks better to have it done. It is interesting to note that when carpeting the stairs an entirely different carpet color was used. Our corridors are a tan moresque color and the stairwell was done in a turquoise blue. The contrast sets off each carpet color and makes a pretty pattern as you see it from a distance or close at hand.

Carpet cleaning other than spot cleaning is done on a regular basis. Since our custodians work a five day week, one-fifth of our carpet is cleaned with a Hoover type cleaner each day. The other four-fifths is cleaned with a regular floor vacuum or is spotted with a back-pack cleaner. Some rooms are spotted more than others because of the type of use they receive.

SHAMPOOING

Our classrooms have never been shampooed or dry cleaned. Our corridors have been cleaned by a dry powder method once a year in the summer. This past summer the corridors were cleaned by a wet shampoo method. As you can see we spend very little time cleaning our carpets.

AFTER SCHOOL USE

The ease of maintenance means that our carpeted rooms are used for after school activities more than other rooms. Carpeted rooms are always ready. They always present a clean appearance. I am sure this means that people like to be on the carpet.

As a final statement about maintenance, may I say that every fact reported in the Carpet Institute's pamphlet, "Excellence and Economy" is true. They are based upon our own experience and are, if anything, conservative.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to give you a birds eye view of our school and our carpet experiment. It is not possible to get you to feel the impact of the carpet on the students, faculty and program of Shaker High School in this short time. The only way you can really feel it is to visit us. May I again say, please feel free to visit our school. Just send a letter telling us when you would like to come. We will make you feel at home.

Thank you.

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